

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 433 093

PS 027 732

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TITLE Building on Children's Strengths: The Experience of Project Spectrum. Project Zero Frameworks for Early Childhood Education, Volume 1.
ISBN ISBN-0-8077-3766-6
PUB DATE 1998-00-00
NOTE 192p.; For Volume 2 and Volume 3, see PS 027 733 and PS 027 734.
AVAILABLE FROM Teachers College Press, P.O. Box 20, Williston, VT 05495-0020; Tel: 800-575-6566 (Toll Free); Fax: 802-864-7626; e-mail: tcp.orders@aidcvt.com; Web site: <http://www.tc.columbia.edu/~tcpres> (cloth: ISBN-0-8077-3766-6, \$36; paper: ISBN-0-8077-3766-6, \$17.95; \$3.50 postage and handling. Add \$0.75 for each additional item).
PUB TYPE Books (010) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE Document Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Cognitive Ability; Cognitive Style; *Curriculum Development; Early Childhood Education; Educational Change; Educational Research; Individual Differences; Learning Theories; Multiple Intelligences; Primary Education; Program Descriptions; *Student Evaluation; *Young Children
IDENTIFIERS Feldman (David Henry); Gardner (Howard); Nonuniversal Theory; *Project Spectrum

ABSTRACT

This book presents the history of Project Spectrum, a 10-year research project dedicated to developing an alternative approach to curriculum and assessment that respects the diverse interests and abilities that children bring to the preschool and early elementary classroom. The first chapter presents Spectrum's theoretical roots--David Henry Feldman's nonuniversal theory and Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences theory--against a backdrop of more-traditional views of human intelligence. The two theories contend that children have a far wider range of abilities than generally are valued in school or measured by IQ and other standardized tests. Chapter 2 describes the Project's work in a Massachusetts preschool to develop assessments that would paint a broad but detailed picture of children's strengths. The chapter highlights how the work created a classroom environment where assessment and curriculum were designed to constantly reinforce each other, both promoting and examining the children's accomplishments in a field. Chapter 3 describes the second phase of the project, during which project workers explored whether the academic performance of at-risk children could be improved by discovering and fostering their areas of strength. Chapters 4 and 5 explore the project's attempts to link the classroom with educational resources in the community, such as visiting a local children's museum and bringing mentors into the classroom, as a way to develop children's strengths more fully. Chapter 6 examines four situations in which educators have, in their own ways, used a Spectrum approach to address problems they wished to correct. Chapter 7 looks back at the many different ways that Gardner's and Feldman's theories have shaped classroom practice, and that classroom practice has, in turn, informed their ideas about cognitive development. Two appendices describe Spectrum activities and Spectrum key abilities. Each chapter contains references.

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